

Story 1398 (1989 Tape 6)

Narrator: Memduh Derin, 59,
graduate of technical
school

Location: Konya, Konya Province

Date: May 1989

Does a Softa¹ Have Even a Hevenk?²

A student enrolled in a medrese used to be called a softa. They were usually very poor, and they often had to beg in order to be able to remain at the medrese and survive. They were so poor that their poverty was the source of a proverbial expression about poverty: "Does a softa have even a hevenk?"

There was a story about how this saying started. One a man gave a grape hevenk to a poor softa. The student ate half of the bunch of grapes but decided to save the other for the following day. He was very hungry, however, and kept looking and looking at the remaining grapes. Finally he said to himself, "Oh, well, who ever heard of a softa who had anything, even a bunch of grapes?" So he ate the remaining half of the hevenk.

¹A softa was a student at a medrese, a Moslem theological seminary. Very poor, many medrese students begged for sustenance. During part of the summer, many of these students earned money for their education by traveling to villages and preaching there--sometimes because there was no regular preacher there, sometimes because charitable congregations were willing to give the softa some money even though his services were not actually needed. On such summer expeditions the students were said to be going out for cer.

²Hevenk refers to a bunch of fruit hung by its stem--usually grapes. Grapes were sometimes dried in such bunches, thus preserved for use during the winter.